



Berkeley Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

TO REPORT OUTAGES
 Call: 1-888-253-4232

DISTRICT OFFICES
 Hours: 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

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MIKE FULLER
 President & CEO

The cost of ‘always on’

WHEN YOU OPEN your electric bill, you probably look straight at the total and then maybe at how many kilowatt-hours you used. You might think to yourself, “That makes sense. I used that much electricity, so I pay for it.” But then there is another line item—a service

charge. It’s there every month, even if you were on vacation or turned down your thermostat so you barely used any power. It is also one of the main sources of misunderstanding when it comes to your electric bill, and it has a lot of members asking, “Why am I being charged for electricity I didn’t use?”

The answer has less to do with the electricity flowing into your home and more to do with the system that makes that flow possible in the first place.

One way to explain it is by thinking of a cell phone plan. Even if you barely make any calls one month, you still pay the base plan fee. That fee covers the tower that provides the signal, the company’s network and the ability to connect whenever you pick up the phone. The electric service charge works on exactly the same principle.

It covers the behind-the-scenes expenses such as maintaining power lines, paying workers to respond to outages, operating billing systems, keeping the meter on your home running properly and upgrading aging equipment before it fails. It also helps utilities plan for the future. Much like a building manager who sets aside money each month for roof repairs before the roof actually leaks, Berkeley uses a piece of every member’s service fee to fund long-term infrastructure projects.

There are two other important points to understand about the service

charge. The first is that around 70 cents of every dollar that the co-op collects goes directly to paying for the energy it delivers to members. That leaves just 30 cents to help cover the fixed costs of everything else needed to keep our system operating—including the co-op’s property taxes, which were nearly \$13 million last year. The other point is that this type of charge is not unique to Berkeley. It may be called a facility charge, or customer fee, or it may be bundled with the energy charge, but every electric utility must recover the fixed costs of keeping the entire electrical system ready to deliver power around-the-clock.

So why don’t we just charge more per kilowatt-hour and get rid of the fee? If we did that, members who use very little electricity (like those with solar panels or vacation homes) wouldn’t pay enough to cover the cost of the physical wires connected to their homes. Meanwhile, a large user, like a family, would end up paying more than their “fair share” of the infrastructure costs. The service charge ensures that everyone who is “plugged in” contributes equally to the upkeep of the system they rely on.

So, the next time that service charge appears on your bill, think of it less as a mysterious penalty and more as your monthly subscription to one of the most important networks in modern life. You are not just paying for electricity—you are also paying for complex network that delivers the energy that powers your life.

Sincerely,



Going for gold

BERKELEY ELECTRIC TRUSTEES Wayne DeWitt, Connie Shuler and Henry Chavis (left to right) recently renewed their Director Gold certifications, reflecting their continued commitment to leadership development and excellence.

The Director Gold program is designed for directors who are dedicated to ongoing education and professional growth. This nationally recognized credential highlights experienced, knowledgeable directors who actively invest in strengthening their governance skills.



Now you see me, now you don't

WHEN THERE IS AN OUTAGE, the last thing you want is linemen playing hide-and-seek trying to find overgrown electrical equipment. We understand that vegetation grows quickly in the Lowcountry, but remember that electrical equipment, such as a padmount transformer, has a required minimum clearance zone around it to ensure safety. Never play, plant or build structures near electrical equipment. It endangers your and our crews' safety and can cause delays when restoring power. Help us by maintaining a 4-foot clearance around the sides and back of padmount transformers, as well as a 10-foot clearance on the front where the cabinet door opens. For more information, visit the Vegetation Management page under "My Energy" on our website at berkeleyelectric.coop.



Guys in Ties

BERKELEY ELECTRIC was proud to participate in a multi-agency career day for the Guys in Ties Club at Devon Forest Elementary. The program consists of a group of fourth- and fifth-grade boys working throughout the year on learning life skills, including how to be a gentleman and a leader.

Alongside our partners in the police department, fire department and public works, we provided students with a comprehensive look at the dedication required to serve our community and keep the lights on.

The students engaged with various professional tools and vehicles while learning the vital role that inter-agency teamwork plays in public safety. We were deeply impressed by the "Guys in Ties" and their commitment to excellence. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your journey!



LAST CHANCE TO REGISTER




berkeleyelectric.coop

JOIN US SATURDAY, APRIL 25!



Henry Chavis
Trustee, District 9

Ready when it matters most

AS A TRUSTEE of Berkeley Electric Cooperative, I have the unique privilege of seeing firsthand what it truly takes to keep the lights on for our members. In April, we take time to pause and recognize the brave men and women who make that possible every single day—our lineworkers.

When storms impact our communities and outages occur, many people experience the inconvenience, but our lineworkers see a call to action. Our crews are always ready when it matters most—leaving family dinners, working through the night and heading into challenging conditions to restore power as safely and quickly as possible. That readiness is not accidental. It comes from rigorous training, experience and a shared commitment to serving others.

What makes lineworkers especially remarkable is that they aren't just restoring power to a system—they're restoring power to their own communities. They live here. They raise their families here. They understand that electricity is more than a convenience; it's essential to daily life, to local businesses, to schools, farms and emergency services. Powering the places we call home is personal to lineworkers.

Electric cooperatives like Berkeley Electric were built on the principle of neighbors helping neighbors, and our lineworkers embody that spirit every day. They are the first to respond and the last to leave, often working long hours behind the scenes. At times, serving our neighbors means going beyond our own service territory through a process known as mutual aid. During major outage events, Berkeley Electric crews stand ready to assist neighboring co-ops—sometimes close to home, and sometimes across state lines—to help restore power. This spirit



PEYTON DRESS

Being a lineman means always standing ready to lend a hand like when BEC crews assisted multiple co-ops across the state in the wake of Hurricane Helene in 2025.

of mutual aid strengthens all cooperatives and ultimately benefits the members we serve.

Even when Mother Nature decides to spare us the worst of her attention, cooperative lineworkers are ready, willing and able to provide assistance wherever they are needed. If you are a regular reader of this magazine, you will remember that Berkeley Electric sent more than 60 linemen and operations crews to assist Blue Ridge Electric with outage restoration in the wake of Winter Storm Fern back in February. And we weren't the only ones, as eight other South Carolina co-ops added to the total number of crews, which topped 1,600 employees.

We understand any time the lights go out can be frustrating, bringing everyday life to a halt. We are grateful to our members for your patience and encouragement during these times. Linework is demanding, physical, and at times, it can be hazardous. Our crews approach each job with a focus on safety and teamwork. They take pride in their craft and in the trust our members place in them.

On April 13, we will celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day, but one day is hardly enough. Every day, we thank lineworkers for their service and dedication, which are the backbone of our cooperative.

To our lineworkers: thank you for your hard work, your readiness, and your unwavering commitment to the communities we serve. We are proud to stand behind you and grateful for all that you do.

Sincerely,

BERKELEY AT-A-GLANCE	DEC. 2024	DEC. 2025
Total kWh sold	437,554,395	473,332,088
No. meters served	133,248	138,073
Avg. residential kWh/meter	1,285	1,280
Avg. residential bill/meter	\$184.43	\$206.19
Miles of line	6501	6635
Avg. daily high temperature	62	62
Avg. daily low temperature	40	40

Amping up for Lowcountry growth

IF YOU'VE LIVED in the Lowcountry for more than a few minutes, you've seen it: new neighborhoods popping up where woods used to be and traffic flowing into areas that were once quiet farmland. For the team at Berkeley Electric Cooperative, this growth isn't just a change in scenery—it's a massive engineering puzzle.

With more than 80 years of history and more than 6,600 miles of energized lines, the co-op has to balance building brand-new infrastructure while maintaining equipment that stretches from suburban neighborhoods to barrier islands to deep forests. And the region is growing fast—which means the cooperative has to think decades ahead.

Planning for the future

According to Chris Rutledge, vice president of engineering, the co-op uses a layered planning system to handle growth. The foundation is a 20-year “long-range plan” that maps out where growth is expected to happen. From that, a four-year construction work plan gets more specific about what needs to be built. Finally, a system improvement list breaks everything down into individual projects and matches them to a budget.

“We have to plan way ahead,” Rutledge says. “Lead times on equipment can be a year, a year and a half, two years or more.”

System engineers also focus on finding ways to prevent and shorten outages. One key tool is “back feeding”—rerouting power from a different direction when part of the system goes down. Think of it like taking a detour when a road is blocked. It can get the lights back on for hundreds of people in just 30 minutes, even while repairs are still happening elsewhere. This requires creating loops that interconnect the system, whenever possible.

Projects across the region

Goose Creek is one of the busiest areas for upgrades right now. Engineers are moving overhead power lines that run through people's backyards and putting them underground in the Tall Pines area. A severe wind event in 2024 has

accelerated the project's timeline. A new substation is also being added near the intersection of highways 176 and 17A to handle rapid commercial and residential growth there.

In the **Moncks Corner** district, the co-op is building a double circuit line—essentially running two sets of power lines on the

same poles along Highway 17A. This allows lines to be further sectionalized, leading to fewer people losing power, and outages lasting shorter amounts of time. Also, if one line has a problem, the other can pick up the load.

Over on **Johns Island**, the challenges are different. The island's marshy ground isn't ideal for wooden poles, so engineers are testing steel poles for the first time to help storm-harden the system. The island's narrow roads and oak-lined streets are also adding extra complexity to every project during the island's current construction boom.

In the **Awendaw district**, a major transmission line project headed by Central Electric Power Cooperative has been in the works for more than 26 years. Navigating environmental protections, archaeological sites and private property has slowed planning of the route. The project is important enough to have been flagged as a priority by the White House. Once complete, it will dramatically improve reliability for an area that currently struggles with outages.



MICAH PONCE

Overhead lines with restricted access are being converted to underground to improve reliability

**A
YEAR
IN
REVIEW**

10,000+
Poles evaluated
Evaluating utility poles helps detect decay or structural weakness that could compromise their strength. Identifying these issues early prevents pole failures and supports safe load-bearing.

2,700+
Miles of line inspected
Through inspections, BEC can spot issues early instead of waiting for something to break. This allows us to be proactive rather than reactive.

1,850
Wildlife guards installed
Animal guards are installed to prevent animal-related outages and protect critical equipment.

Inspections and innovation

Beyond new construction, the co-op inspected more than 2,700 miles of lines and more than 10,000 poles last year alone. The Engineering and Operations departments also installed nearly 1,800 wildlife guards—devices that keep squirrels and other animals from causing outages.

The co-op is also refurbishing a mobile substation—essentially an entire substation on a flatbed trailer—for less than \$1 million, rather than buying a new one for \$5 million. It will be stationed in Johns Island, ready to be deployed the moment a storm or equipment failure strikes.

All of this work—the planning, the building, the inspecting—exists for one purpose: to provide the safe and reliable energy you depend on.

Be sure to tune in

If you would like more information on stories like this one, tune in to the co-op’s “Power Talk” podcast on Berkeley Electric’s YouTube page.



PEYTON DRESS

Plans to improve reliability by upgrading lines serving Cane Bay are underway this year.

District highlights—a closer look

<u>District</u>	<u>Project type</u>	<u>Project details</u>
Goose Creek	Underground conversion	Moving overhead lines underground in the Treeland, Coventry Green and Fairfax neighborhoods to reduce storm damage.
Goose Creek	New substation	Adding a substation at State Road (Hwy. 176 & 17A) to support growth.
Moncks Corner	Double circuit	Installing double circuit in Jamestown to split load and improve reliability.
Cooper Store Road	Voltage conversion	Multi-year 25 kV conversion to improve reliability for Cane Bay and surrounding areas.
Johns Island	Infrastructure testing	Using steel poles to prevent leaning/rotting poles and to storm-harden area.
Johns Island	Roadwork coordination	Moving lines underground at River Road & Main Road roundabout and along Savannah Highway.
Central Electric	Transmission line	Nearing approval for long-awaited transmission route to boost reliability.



770+ Structures painted

By preserving the structural integrity of equipment, painting reduces failures, extends service life, and improves overall system reliability.



3,200+ Underground structures inspected

Early detection allows for timely maintenance and repairs, reducing outages and preventing structural deterioration.



500+ Miles of right-of-way trimmed

Removing known hazards that pose the highest risk during storms reduce outage frequency and restoration time.



800+ Miles of right-of-way sprayed

These proactive efforts directly reduce outage frequency and restoration time.

Making a positive impact

Meet Clay Helms, Berkeley Electric's new board trustee

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

CLAY HELMS is not afraid of change.

That's a good thing, because he has stepped into an industry that powers one of the fastest-growing areas in the state.

In November, Helms, who lives in Awendaw, was elected to the District 2 seat on Berkeley Electric Cooperative's board. It's not a position Helms thought he'd be in a few years ago.

"I never considered myself somebody that would run for anything in politics," says Helms. "When I think about giving back, I'm the guy that wants to help paint your house or build a deck."

However, when the opportunity arose to run for the open co-op board seat, Helms realized it offered him another way to support the community he now calls home.

"Berkeley Electric does a lot of charitable work and a lot for the Awendaw community," says Helms. "That's something I really want to be a part of. Now that I'm involved, I'm glad I did it."

Helms brings a diverse professional background to the boardroom. For nearly two decades, he worked in the medical device industry, selling orthopedic products and eventually running his own distributorship in South Carolina. Three years ago, however, he made a significant career shift, launching a family-operated home renovation business, Marshview Homes.

"I wanted to be home with my daughter," says Helms, whose youngest, Collins, is 8. "I was willing to make less money if I had to, just so I could be more present and be local."

Helms and his wife, Wendy, moved to Awendaw five years ago after living in the Charleston area. Wendy serves on the Awendaw Town Council.

"It's quieter out here," says Helms, who has also lived in Rock Hill,



In February, new BEC board trustee Clay Helms (right) took part in Co-op Day at the State House with other co-op leaders and employees.

CANYON DURHAM

"I just want to be a part of a great organization and have a positive impact."

Orangeburg and Columbia. "It's a rural community, and I like that."

His years in the corporate world and as an entrepreneur give him experience that Helms believes can benefit his role as a cooperative board member.

"I've been a business owner for 15 years, so when we're talking about finances and planning, that stuff just makes sense to me," he says. "If you put trigonometry in front of me, I'd fail it. But when it comes to business and numbers, I just understand things."

At the same time, Helms is approaching his role with humility and a willingness to learn from the other members of Berkeley Electric's experienced board, which includes a wide range of professional backgrounds such as education, ministry and other small business owners.

"There is a lot of wisdom in that room," says Helms, who is 53. "I'm probably the youngest one there, and I'm good with being mentored."

One of the first things Helms participated in as a trustee was an

Clay Helms

- ▶ Originally from Rock Hill, now resides in Awendaw.
- ▶ Played college football at North Greenville College.
- ▶ Served in Army National Guard.
- ▶ Spent two decades in medical device industry. Now operates a home services business.
- ▶ Has an adult son and an 8-year-old daughter.
- ▶ Married to Awendaw town councilwoman Wendy Helms.

employee appreciation luncheon. To him, it further confirmed he'd made the right move toward Berkeley Electric.

"I'm not the type to just sit back and eat. I walked around and talked to people," he recounts. "I could tell people enjoy working there. It's a really great company."

That's something that Helms doesn't want to change.

"I'm not coming in with grand visions," he says. "We're in a servant role. I just want to be a part of a great organization and have a positive impact."